

Ventura County Star

Keep traffic moving in Southland

By Toni Young

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Southern California and the state at large are facing a fundamental crisis in transportation that will only continue to get worse if we do not find ways to pay for our transportation priorities. According to the 2004 Regional Transportation Plan adopted by the Southern California Association of Governments, our region will barely have enough public-sector revenues to fund short-term improvements and maintain the existing road and transit systems, let alone make improvements to meet future demands.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger took a small but important step in the right direction with the recent announcement that he would be restoring this one year \$1.3 billion in gasoline tax revenues to fund critical transportation improvements.

Southern California's freeways and city streets are becoming increasingly crowded as the number of residents grows. Commuters compete for space with trucks transporting goods from overseas through our region to consumers nationwide. Our air quality deteriorates as the congestion on our roads and highways grows.

We thank the Schwarzenegger administration for recognizing the dire state of our transportation infrastructure and restoring just once those vital funds needed to help California rebuild.

We must, however, remain vigilant and insist that the state Legislature does provide these vital funds as the state budget process progresses over the summer. We must continue letting our state leaders know that our long-term economic viability and quality of life are directly related to our ability to invest in our transportation infrastructure.

We must also make sure that federal lawmakers understand the importance of investing in California's transportation infrastructure as they move forward with reauthorization legislation.

The fact that our state continues to contribute considerably more federal gasoline sales tax revenues than the funding we get back is a travesty, especially considering the critical role our transportation network plays in the national economy.

Southern California's transportation systems lay the groundwork for the goods movement network that fuels the nation's economy.

We must continue to work together as a region to support critical investments like the Metrolink upgrades in Simi Valley, adding sound walls and widening lanes on Highways 101 and 118 in Ventura County, Alameda Corridor East road-rail improvements, and completing gaps and constructing new HOV lanes on overcrowded freeways in Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino and Los Angeles counties.

Barely one-quarter of the transportation revenues currently projected for Southern California between now and 2030 are expected to come from federal and state sources, and even some of those sources are facing cuts as we speak. Even as Congress nears completion of its comprehensive transportation-authorizing measure, there are strong indications that the formulas currently used to allocate funds for the federal Congestion Management Air Quality program will be significantly changed, costing Southern California up to \$200 million in critical traffic relief dollars.

We must also find new ways to develop innovative public/private partnerships for key transportation improvements, and the governor's "Go California" package of legislative reforms will help facilitate that effort. Development of the Alameda Corridor created the national model for how to engage the private sector in infrastructure improvements, and we must identify new means of securing private involvement in future transportation investments.

The governor's recent actions and legislative proposals are important first steps, but we must continue the fight on all of these fronts if we are to meet the needs of Southern California's transportation future.

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